

Message Text

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SUBJ: BRIEFING PAPER FOR VICE PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER: LA

SCALA TRIP

BEGIN TEXT: OVER TWO YEARS AGO, IT WAS ANNOUNCED IN ROME AND WASHINGTON THAT LA SCALA OPERA COMPANY OF MILAN WOULD GO TO THE U.S. FOR PERFORMANCES IN SEPTEMBER 1976, TO PROVIDE THE KINGPIN OF THE ITALIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE U.S. BICENTENNIAL. THE KENNEDY CENTER IN WASHINGTON HAS PLANNED IT AS PART OF A WORLD FESTIVAL OF OPERA, ISSUING STUNNING BROCHURES AND PRE-SELLING ANYWHERE FROM 15-20,000 TICKETS.

TWO MONTHS AGO, IT BEGAN TO APPEAR TO THE ITALIANS THAT THE TRIP WOULD PROVE TOO COSTLY. THE DEPRECIATION OF THE LIRE AND HIGH COST OVERRUNS ON LA SCALA'S TRIP TO LONDON WERE CUTTING INTO DIRECTOR GRASSI'S ATTEMPTS TO ASSURE OVERALL SURVIVAL FOR LA SCALA, IN THE FACE OF VARIOUS KINDS OF GOVERNMENTAL UNCONCER. AT A TIME WHEN ITALIAN POLITICANS TALK AUSTERITY, IT SEEMED A LUXURY.

LATER FACTORS, NOTABLY THE IMPOSITION OF EXCHANGE CONTROL MEASURES AND FINALLY THE DISASTROUS EARTHQUAKE, WOULD PRODUCE AN EVEN GREATER SENSE THAT THE TRIP WAS A LUXURY ITALY COULD ILL AFFORD.

MEAHWHILE MARTIN FEINSTEIN, DIRECTOR OF THE KENNEDY CENTER IN WASHINGTON, VISITED MILAN AND ROME. ASCERTAINING THAT THE GAP WAS ONLY DLR580,000, HE IMMEDIATELY PLEDGED TO COVER HALF OF

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THIS AMOUNT. IMPLYING THAT HE COULD PROBABLY CONTRIBUTE MORE,

HE RETURNED TO WASHINGTON AND IMMEDIATELY RAISED DLR290,000 FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES, INCLUDING A GENEROUS GESTURE BY THE STAGEHANDS' UNION.

TWO DAYS AGO, WITH THE EARTHQUAKE FOREMOST IN THEIR MINDS, THE ITALIANS PREPARED A PRESS RELEASE ANNOUNCING THE CANCELLATION OF THE TRIP AND THE TRANSFER OF FUNDS TO THE DISASTER AREA. UNDER PRESSURE FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND THE EMBASSY, THEY AGREED TO HOLD OFF THE FINAL DECISION UNTIL FRIDAY, TOMORROW. MARTIN FEINSTEIN, MEANWHILE, ARRIVES IN MILAN FRIDAY MORNING AND IN ROME FRIDAY AFTERNOON IN AN ATTEMPT TO FORESTALL WHAT HE CONSIDERS TO BE A DISASTER. SINCE HE PROBABLY WILL BE ABLE TO GO EVEN FURTHER IN OFFERING FUNDS THAN HE HAS THUS FAR, HE WILL HAVE A PERSUASIVE ROLE TO PLAY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ITALIAN POSITION HAS HARDENED.

THE POINTS THAT MIGHT BE MADE TO FOREIGN MINISTER RUNOR AT THIS TIME UNDERLINE THE /IMPORTANCE/ OF THE LA SCALA TRIP. WE SEE FOUR BASIC POSITIONS TO TAKE:

1. THE US PRIVATE SECTOR'S WILLINGNESS TO GO MORE THAN HALF WAY ALREADY, FAR BEYOND THE ORIGINAL CONTRACTED TERMS, UNDERLINES THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS TRIP, ORIGINALLY CONCEIVED AS THE MAJOR ITALIAN GESTURE IN HONOR OF THE U.S. BICENTENNIAL; TAKING ITS PLACE IN A FESTIVAL OF THE GREAT OPERA COMPANIES OF THE WORLD, IT IS AN OUTSTANDING OPPORTUNITY FOR ITALY TO STAR IN A WORLD CONTEXT, AS IT DESERVES;

2. A CANCELLATION WOULD RECEIVE A GREAT DEAL OF UNFAVORABLE PUBLICITY AND REFLECT FURTHER THE IMAGE OF AN ITALY UNSTABLE IN ITS POLITICS AND ITS ECONOMY; IN ANY CASE, THE SAVINGS IN FOREIGN EXCHANGE WOULD BE NEGLIGIBLE -- ALL OF THE EXPENDITURES (SALARIES, SHIPPING) ARE ON THE ITALIAN SIDE AND U.S. COSTS CAN BE COVERED FROM THE U.S. CONTRIBUTIONS;

3. WHILE THE GESTURE OF DIVERTING THE FUNDS INTO THE DISASTER AREA HAS A CERTAIN VALUE, IT IS MORE IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE CANCELLATION OF THIS IMPORTANT EVENT AT EXACTLY THE TIME WHEN 25 MILLION DOLLARS OF EARTHQUAKE AID FROM THE U.S. HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED MIGHT EASILY LOOK TO MANY LIKE AN ACT OF INGRATITUDE;

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4. THERE IS A MORAL, EVEN A LEGAL AND CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATION INVOLVED; THE KENNEDY CENTER IS DEEPLY COMMITTED TO THIS PERFORMANCE AND HAS INVESTED A GREAT DEAL OF MONEY IN ITS SUCCESS AND THUS IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE THAT PAINFUL, COSTLY AND UNPLEASANT LEGAL ACTIONS MIGHT ENSUE.VOLPE

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